

PRONUNCIATION STRATEGIES USED BY EFL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT


This study aims to figure out the strategies used by English as a foreign language (EFL) students to learn pronunciation. The study used questionnaire to collect the data. The study was carried out at an Islamic Boarding School in Greater Aceh, Aceh Province, Indonesia. The results of the study showed that the students predominantly used input/practice strategies, consisting of concrete experiences e.g., searching, listening, watching, and repeating sounds, to improve their pronunciation.

KEYWORDS: *EFL Students, Pronunciation Strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is an essential aspect in learning a foreign language as it significantly influences language learners' communication skills, and thus can also affect the learners' confidence in speaking the language (Akyol, 2013). In terms of learning English, when English language learners can use proper pronunciation, they will be easily understood despite making mistakes in grammar, for instance (Yates, 2002). In general, pronunciation can be referred to the generation of the sounds used to create meanings (Yates, 2002).

However, some studies show that in learning pronunciation, English a foreign language (EFL) students often face difficulties. EFL students in Indonesia, for example, have a difficulty to pronounce English words due to first language interference and lack of knowledge in English sound systems (Donal, 2016). Consequently, some strategies are needed overcome those difficulties. It is therefore necessary to help the students develop their knowledge on the strategies in learning pronunciation so that they will be able to practice pronunciation beyond classroom (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996).



In relation to the above discussions, this study aimed to discover more about the strategies that the students used to learn to pronounce English words. The study was conducted at a senior boarding school in Indonesia where English becomes one of the two foreign languages that the students should use in daily communication. The study was done in the boarding school because the school applies a rule that the student should speak English in a certain day. The students also have a separate time in studying each English skill. Thus, the chance that English is practiced is higher compared in other schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW *PRONUNCIATION*

Pronunciation can be referred to the generation of the sounds used to create meanings (Yates, 2002). According to the Dictionary.com, pronunciation is defined as “the act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability” (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

Pronunciation has a significant role in understanding spoken language. Not only for the listener, but good pronunciation will also allow the speaker to be more confident in speaking. Some aspects of pronunciation can help listeners understand the messages better when properly used (Hancock, 2018). People learn to distinguish important linguistic sounds and patterns in the receptive stage by listening to the language, whereas in the productive stage, people learn to speak or generate what they have previously learned.

Learning pronunciation in a second or foreign language is a task that requires a certain self-management skills. One of the main reasons is that because the limited classroom time, it is difficult for students to focus systematically. Consequently, students who wish to improve their pronunciation usually have to practice on their own time beyond classroom, with their own strategies.

PRONUNCIATION LEARNING STRATEGIES

This present study utilized the pronunciation learning strategies based on a taxonomy proposed by Eckstein (2007), who connected the taxonomy with the learning cycle construct of Kolb (1984) (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Pronunciation learning strategies linked with Kolb's (1984) construct and second language acquisition (Eckstein, 2007, p. 35)

Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle Construct	Pronunciation Acquisition Construct	Pronunciation Learning Strategies
Concrete Experience	Input / Practice	Input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent listening • Focusing on articulatory gestures of others • Active listening • Eagerly listening to new sounds • Putting self in proximal points for hearing L2 pronunciation: TV, Movies, Radio, etc. • Representing sounds in memory • Focusing on individual syllables of words Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading aloud • Practicing new sounds • Imitating and/or mimicry of native speakers • Practicing 'mock talk' or imitating L2 prosody using L1 words • Talking aloud/role-play • Memorizing the pronunciation of words • Helping facial muscles become accustomed to accommodating L2 pronunciation • Practicing different sounds, first in isolation and then in the context of words • Repeating after tapes in a language laboratory
Reflection on Observation	Noticing / Feedback	Noticing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticing the intricate differences between L1 and L2 pronunciation • Focusing on supersegmentals of language • Intent listening • Distinguishing errors among other speakers • Focusing on articulatory gestures of others • Listening carefully to errors made by native speakers to infer key sounds or structures • Acquiring a general knowledge of phonetics Feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-monitoring • Focusing on supersegmentals of own speech • Using phonetic symbols and transcriptions • Monitoring and eliminating negative interference • Active listening • Asking for help • Cooperating with peers
Abstract Conceptualization	Hypothesis forming	Hypothesis Forming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and eliminating negative interference • Self-correcting • Acquiring a general knowledge of phonetics • Doing special exercises for sounds not existing in the learner's native language • Finding out about the target language pronunciation
Action Based on New Conceptualization	Hypothesis testing	Hypothesis Testing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating new words according to new hypotheses • Skipping difficult words • Rehearsing sounds • Using proximal articulations • Increasing or decreasing volume of speech • Using a slower rate of speech • Using clear speech • Lowering anxiety

RESEARCH METHODS

This quantitative study was conducted in a senior high boarding school situated in Greater Aceh, Aceh Province, Indonesia. The study selected 50 second grade students as the participants of the study. The data were collected by using questionnaire, adapted from Eckstein (2007). The data were analyzed by looking at the percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

STRATEGIES USED BY EFL STUDENTS IN PRONUNCIATION

After distributing the questionnaire, the data were obtained regarding the pronunciation learning strategies used by EFL students.

TABLE 2. Questionnaire results of pronunciation learning strategies

No	Learning strategies	Statement	Percentage (%)	
			Yes	No
1	Input / Practice	I ask my teacher to know how to pronounce a word when I find new vocabulary.	100	0
2		I try to look up dictionary to know how to pronounce a word when I find new vocabulary.	90	10
3		I use television, radio, etc to improve my pronunciation.	80	20
4		I will imitate myself when I get new word from my friends' conversation	80	20
5		I will repeat a new vocabulary after the teacher or device pronounce it	80	20
6		In reading class, I prefer to read a text loudly	90	10
7		In listening class, I practice the word by opening my mouth widely.	70	30
8		In speaking class, I try to pronounce the words speak by concerning the rule of articulation	40	60
9	Noticing / Feedback	I realize that my native language still affect my pronunciation	80	20
10		I find it is difficult to pronounce certain sound in English	90	10
11		I study about the difference between Indonesian and English pronunciation when I speak English	60	40
12		I learn how each phonetic symbols sound in English	70	30
13		I often practice a speech with my friend before perform it in front of the class	80	20
14		I watch how people's mouth, tongue position, etc when they speak	50	50
15		I will ask for my friends' opinion on my English pronunciation when I speak in English	60	40
16		I can notice when they make mistakes in pronouncing a word when I listen to my friends,	40	60
17	Hypothesis Forming	I will practice how to pronounce a new word until I can speak as native speaker	40	60
18		I always look at the phonetic symbol when I look up the meaning of vocabulary in dictionary	50	50
19		I set a definite special time to practice my pronunciation	40	60
20		I have special exercise to improve my pronunciation	40	60
21		I try to pronounce like a native speaker when I speak in English	50	50
22		I correct the sound directly when I found myself of making error in pronouncing a word	50	50
23		I use phonetic symbols to help me when I found new vocabulary	50	50
24		I will guess the pronunciation of a word that I do not know how to pronounce it based on phonetic symbols I learned	40	60
25	Hypothesis Testing	I feel that I have to be able to learn or sound out like native speaker	50	50
26		I try to correct my pronunciation until I can speak like native speaker	50	50
27		I prefer to use the audio that speak the word, sentences and idea in clearly and simply when I learn English pronunciation	50	50
28		I will increase/decrease the volume of the audio when I listen to the sound of words to the utterance of a word	50	50
29		I use proximal articulation in pronouncing a word	40	60
30		I pay a certain attention to the rehearing sounds	30	70
31		I concern the word stress and pitch in pronounce English word.	30	70
32		I will check difficult word to pronounce by searching the way it sound	40	60

a. Input and practice

Input strategy is any stimulus that exposes learners to sounds, such as the radio or TV, conversation, or visual representations of phonemes. In this part, practice is the action of producing sounds in separation or communicative circumstances.

The data showed that the students were practicing intent listening. Since they were in boarding curriculum system, they had listening and speaking class apart from other language skills. They had active listening and eagerly listened to new sounds. They had a frequent schedule in listening and speaking class that they might studied in multimedia room so that they can practice listening or speaking class intensely. They had the listening class in the multimedia room that the teacher used tapes or screen to play listening material where they could get authentic learning practice.


Additionally, in speaking class, they also sometimes had reading aloud section so that they could practicing new sound, focused on their friends' words and memorizing how their teachers' pronunciation of a word. They also often got to practice speaking by using role play in front of the classroom. Besides, they also had English day that they had to speak English all day. By this, the students got more opportunity to also have a concentration in their teachers' or friends'. By looking at their friends' gestures and mimicry, it also made them easier to understand what they were talking about.

By considering the above data, it shows that input/practice is the most frequent strategy used by students, such as the radio, conversation, or visual representations of phonemes since almost all categories were fulfilled.

b. Noticing and Feedback

Noticing and feedback are included in reflective observation that refers to the act of reflecting on someone's performance in an activity or it might be taking into account both achievements and failures.

The data showed that only some of the students had listening actively while focusing to the errors which were made by the speaker and asking their friends' opinions about it. Most of them still focused on the vocabulary meaning on the material because they were flustered enough to answer the question especially while on listening or speaking test. The reasons of this might because this ability is much likely done by auditory students in which they could concentrate enough to listen even to a specific sound. Another problem is that they did not have any native English teachers since native speaker's pronunciation is believed as important aspect in this strategy. The native voice was only heard or listened through the multimedia room in listening or speaking



class. And to overcome this shortcoming, the teacher was often running the listening class by choosing the authentic material through the cassette, CDs, or videos in multimedia room.

c. Hypothesis Forming

Hypothesis forming is the perceptual progression which tries to link the break between actual and target pronounced words by determining the response from others or listeners. This correlates to the abstract conceptualization phase of pronunciation acquisition that refers to applying theory to the experience in carrying it out (Eckstein, 2007).

The data showed that only few of the students that had specific practices for sounds which they did not find exist in Indonesian language and found out about the English pronunciation. This might because they could only practice speaking with their friends which mostly had the same level of pronunciation as them. Only some of the students who eagerly used this strategy would find a book or dictionaries, or other pronunciation-related references to master pronunciation skills. Since mobile phones were not permitted in boarding school, most of them had limited access to ensure directly the pronunciation correctness at the time they were speaking with their friends. Surely, only those who were definitely interested in speaking or listening would practice this strategy intentionally.

d. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing can be established by saying a word with a slightly changed vowel sound following a breakdown in communication with the goal of re-establishing communication. In short, the students need to boost confidence to try another version of the sound difference based on their hypothesis of the difference.

The data showed that this strategy had the same proportion with hypothesis forming, where only few students repeated new words, skipped difficult words, rehearsed sounds, used a slower rate of speech, increased or decreased volume of speech, and used clear speech. Students used this strategy to practice more after the first time trying to speak which similar to a native speaker. In this strategy, students believed that their stubborn pronunciation would be better by keeping repetition and rehearsing sounds. Only those who had high confidence would keep trying practice this strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

The most dominant strategy used by the students is input/practice, such as searching, listening, watching, repeating sounds, or practicing the sounds to improve pronunciation. This was the flexible strategy that can be applied easily in boarding school circumstance. The second strategy is noticing/feedback, which means taking note of the rules and outlines of language purposefully and fortuitously. The next is hypothesis forming and hypothesis testing, which got the same preference.

This study proposes some suggestions that teachers should inspire the students to develop more pronunciation learning strategies. As the first step, teacher may provide various information about the importance of good pronunciation in speaking English. Teacher should also familiarize the students with some strategies so that students are likely more interested in learning pronunciation.

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